

A Halo 'Round Synder's Heart

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Summary: Angel reveals why he's been having a secret affair with Principal Synder.

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A HALO 'ROUND SYNDER'S HEART

He will grin afterwards, an occurrence simultaneously as rare and as familiar as a Christmas morning. His kisses are dry and airless, lips brushing the enormous bald spot atop your head. He will cradle your head in his lap and scoot back so you can stretch out on the bed and he will stare out your bedroom window at the moon and hum a few bars of the song that's been stuck in his head for the last week, recorded by a band you've never heard of, MTV-grunge stuff you'd surely hate. He appears to be two decades younger than you, although you decide you're too enlightened to wonder his exact age.

You ask him, Was I gentle enough? You ask him, It's won't bother you if I have a smoke? You query him that and a dozen other reassurances and he answers all with a single "Yeah." You hear him later that night, you're in the shower, he's on the phone with his girlfriend, it's the most words you've ever heard him say at once: 'Sorry, honey. Well, you know what I do for a living. See you after school tomorrow. Sure. Love you too.' You don't know what his girlfriend thinks he does for a living. When you walk out of the bathroom, damp towel round your waist, he will be in your closet, holding up a shirt to his chest, trying it on without actually trying it on. The shirt is an ancient lime green button-down with orange paisleys and lapels as wide as the desert. He will say, it's so ugly, it's beautiful. He favors black trenchcoats, black pants, black shirts, black shoes; his girlfriend bugs him to for God's sake add a little color to his wardrobe. He starts to put the paisley shirt back on its wire hanger. You stop him, saying, It's yours, please, you certainly may.

He has a small pink scar on his upper left ribcage, he claims he was scratched by a demon, he claims vampires are real and the gates of

hell are only three blocks away. If he wants hell, you say, he oughtta try a PTA meeting. You kiss the scar and you help him with his homework. He audits night classes at the community college, knowledge acquired purely for knowledge's sake. Before he leaves, he will ask you, won't you loan him fifty bucks for his rent. You tell him, this is real life, the only demons are the IRS, incantations cannot save him-- McDonald's up the street has had a help wanted sign up for months, they hire retarded kids even, please do put in an application. Thanks for the shirt, he says, he swears, it truly is so hideous that it's beautiful.

\* \* \*

In the morning, make the following purchases on the way to school: five rolls of Tums, extra strength; the Doors' new Greatest Hits Remastered CD; and a liter-sized bottle of Sam's Choice mineral water. The cashier at Walmart rasps "Good Morning" like it's a foreign curse. A former student of yours, she is, she's the one who used to call you Mickey Mouse, the way your ears jutt out from your skull. "Paper or plastic?" You have no preference. You tell the cashier, you pause a moment and smile and tell her, Have a nice life.

In the car, pop in the Doors CD. Jim Morrison. Twenty years ago you saw this band live, Dominion Ampetheatre in San Francisco, same neighborhood where you grew up. That song of theirs, 'The End'? That concert was the end for them. Close. Jim was as plush and pudgy as biscuit dough by then, half his synapses burnt by recreational pharmaceuticals. But you, you were still young, sported a head of long, thick brown curly locks, you used to go barefoot every summer day, you used to carry a paperback of the collected works of William Blake in your pocket. You used to be able to string an acoustic guitar in five seconds flat.

Fumble in the passenger seat, grab a roll of Tums, crunch down twice the recommended dosage. Breakfast of champions. Park your beige BMW in your assigned space. Your office at Sunnydale High School is in the corner past the cafeteria. PRINCIPAL FLUTIE, the brass nameplate beside the door reads, although your name is Synder. Flutie is gone; you've waited months for maintenance to make good on their promise to update the sign.

Sit in your leather-backed chair.

First thing the phone rings. It's not him. He never calls in the daytime. His girlfriend's mother is on line three.

"My daughter has so much potential, but she wastes it," the mother says. The daughter/girlfriend is a student here. The daughter/girlfriend knows nothing of you and he, has no clue how deep your relationship goes with her boyfriend; sometimes, you feel, you don't either.

"My daughter stays out all night, I don't know where she goes. Her boyfriend, he's five years older than her. It's called statutory rape. I should have him prosecuted," the mother says.

"She respects you," the mother says. "You probably don't realize this, but my daughter talks about you. She thinks you're a great principal."

\* \* \*

You see him and his girlfriend at the mall: you're buying authentic Native American kiln-fired clay cookware, and he's walking with his hand on her back. She's wearing a blue halter top, and you watch his fingers trail up her spine. Her skin. Golden.

Unlike like at school, when she is with him, she stands up straight, chin high.

\* \* \*

Images leech into your waking dreams: muskets held aloft by the barrel; horses on snow-covered cobblestone streets; a Paris alleyway, powdered whores in corsets. It's him, those stories he tells you. Such realistic bullshit. From the eternal history major. He arrives on your front porch at three in the morning. He wakes you, he croons a ballad in Gaelic. He is intoxicated. Not on wine, he swears. On lack of sleep. Haven't slept in a week. Fret all the time. Used to have a fortune. No joke. Squandered the money. During the "blue period." Did you know he used to live in Europe. Did you know tomes used to be written about his exploits. Goddamn books. No joke. Scourge of Belfast. He still resides in a mansion. You tell him, "Kid, you're not Picasso, you did not have a 'blue period'." You tell him, "If you live in a mansion, it must be abandoned, you must have had to pull the boards off a window to get in."

He says, he doesn't LIVE in a mansion; he doesn't LIVE, period.

You tell him, true, his way of life is no way of LIFE at all.

You tell him you have done the math and he is twenty-three years old. You were twenty-three once. It's not a fatal condition. It can be overcome.

He says, no, you don't understand, don't understand, don't understand.

You ask him, "There are others? Besides me and your girlfriend?"

"Whattaya mean?"

You cross your arms.

"No," he says.

"Don't bullshit me."

His eyes are all shade. "A few others. You don't know them."

"Do they pay?"

"Does it matter? I don't charge you."

"You 'borrowed' most of my credit limit last month."

He shakes his head, clasps his hands behind his back. "I like you. Is that so complicated?"

"Sure. And we have to always do it with the lights out cause you like the dark so much."

"Like the darkness, blah, I am the darkness."

"How trite, yet angsty."

"So I'm Mr. Angsty. Maybe I love you. How's that for trite?"

"You have to sleep sometime."

"There's this place in Mexico," he says. "Desert. Mesas. Gorgeous. I promise I'll take you there sometime."

You say to him, he should come inside.

He says he can't, he has wars to fight, invisible enemies with teeth like nightmares. You take this to mean he's taken up heroin. Or crack. Or worse. He hugs you rough, blows raspberries upon your soft paunchy gut, giggles, his skin smells like copper. Flash of black, trenchcoat billows behind him, faster than regret, he is gone.

Five minutes later, when you're pulling off your slacks to return to bed, you realize he's pickpocketed your wallet. A new ulcer burns into your stomach lining, and diarrhea plagues you for the next five days.

End  
file.